Dear devotees,

We began the month of December with the Karthigai Deepam festival in progress. On Karthigai night, the Ashram fed 8,000 pilgrims who stopped in from their girivalam. As the month and year come to a close, early morning Margazhi pujas are taking place at Bhagavan's Shrine and preparations are underway for Bhagavan’s upcoming 143rd Jayanti on the 7th January.

Meanwhile the Ashram’s medical staff is alerting devotees to a possible Covid surge in Tiruvannamalai during the coming weeks and advising precautionary steps such as mask use and social distancing.

In this January 2023 issue we read the life story of Shanta Rungachary who came to Bhagavan at the age of 12 in what would be a life changing experience (p. 3).

Also this issue, see photos from the Ashram archives (pp. 8-9) and learn of the recent Ashram-sponsored Mahakumbhabhishekam of Pandava Kovil (p. 10).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to https://sriramanamaharshi.org or write to us at saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org.

In Sri Bhagavan,
Saranagati

---

Calendar of Ashram Events

6th Jan (Fri) Full Moon, Natarajar Abhishekam
7th Jan (Sat) Sri Bhagavan's 143rd Jayanti
9th Jan (Mon) Swami Ramanananda Day
12th Jan (Thu) Sivaprakasam Pillai Day
14th Jan (Sat) Bogi; Ramaswami Pillai Day
15th Jan (Sun) Makara Sankaranthi Pongal
16th Jan (Mon) Maattu Pongal
17th Jan (Tue) Arunachaleswarar Pradakshina
19th Jan (Thu) Pradosham
3rd Feb (Fri) Pradosham
4th Feb (Sat) Punarvasu/Full Moon
5th Feb (Sun) Full Moon Sri Chakra Puja
7th Feb (Tue) Swami Rajeswarananda Day
18th Feb (Sat) Mahasivaratri
Following a tragedy, children may sometimes exhibit adult behaviour. When the world they grew up in is suddenly taken from them, they can raise mature questions and develop an emotional literacy which under normal circumstances would not come about until a much later age.

Such was the case of Shanta Rungachary who lost her father at the age of twelve. In 1934 she made an appeal by letter to the Ashram: ‘Personal and Private to Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai’. Her letter contained no inquiries about how to manage loss and grief but rather concerns about her irascible temper, the tendency to get angry, and the effects such behaviour was having on others, not least of all, on her mother. Shanta recalls this period in her life:

\[
\text{It was a bad time for me. I had just lost a father I had worshipped. I was twelve, going on thirteen and at once all has been said. I\ldots} 
\]

\[
\text{desperately needed a confidante, an adviser, somebody preferably outside the family, and out of the blue the name of Ramana Maharshi came to me. His was the only name I had ever heard my father — a stubborn, intolerant sceptic — mention without any codicils. I decided, therefore, to write to the sage of Tiruvannamalai secretly. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, I finally sent off a letter asking the Maharshi directly to \text{'}please, I beg of you, help me with my temper problem\text{‘}. Within a week I received a reply signed by the Sarvadhikari, informing me that my letter had been received and placed before the Maharshi and that his message to me was that if I myself made a constant and earnest effort to overcome my temper I would rid myself of it, and that he sent me his blessings. My first reaction was one of astonishment at being treated like a grown-up, since I had always been told what to do, guided, instructed, warned, but never challenged except on Sports Day. And here was this great Guru as good as telling me: \text{‘It is your temper, isn\text{‘}t it? So, you yourself must deal with it.\text{‘} He had simply batted the ball back into my court in the nicest possible way by treating me as an individual in my own right. I rather liked that.} 
\]

This correspondence was just the beginning, and it was not long before the family would pass through Tiruvannamalai and make a short stop at Sri Ramanasramam:

\[
\text{Ramana Maharshi entered my life again a year or so later when my sister took our whole family on a pilgrimage. The entire thing was going to take less than a week and we were to stay at Tiruvannamalai for only two days. But as it turned out we stayed at Ramanasramam for the whole week and I wept like a lost child when we had to leave. The visit to Ramanasramam was a shattering experience for me. I do believe I literally fell in love with Ramana Maharshi. I was in a daze, my mind was gone; I was in a state of dumbfounded ecstasy. This love which had been awakened was the kind which totally bypasses the physical plane and creates an awareness of a different kind of consciousness which can only be described as a mindless rapture, pure joy. It is an unlocated, pervasive state of being sparked by some kind of recognition and it stays with you and you are never the same again.} 
\]

The original intention to visit the Ashram may have been rather casual but as soon as the family entered the Ashram compound in the pre-dawn silence that first day, they perceived that this would not be just one of a string of stops in their pilgrimage:

\[
\text{We arrived at Tiruvannamalai just before dawn. After reaching the Ashram we bathed and had our breakfast, and then made our} 
\]
way to the Hall. My mother, brother and sister went ahead and quickly disappeared into the Hall. I hung back, unaccountably apprehensive. Then, as I at last composed myself and got to the door and looked in, I saw reclining on a sofa, a golden-brown figure with the most radiant countenance I had ever seen before or since and, as I stood there riveted to the spot, the Maharshi turned and looked at me. When I remember it even now, more than forty years later, tears come to my eyes as they did then. I stood there, God knows how long, just looking at that face. Then, as in a trance, I moved forward deliberately towards him and touched his feet. Fighting my way through the disapproving glances that followed, I then made my way to a place near the window. Once I was seated, I let my tears flow. I remember I spent a good part of that morning wiping my eyes. They were not tears of grief nor were they tears of joy. Maybe they were for something which I saw in the Maharshi fleetingly and which I also want and shall forever seek. Yes, I cried for myself then and I still do it now. Never before had I seen in a human countenance a more intense, inward life and yet one which remained so transparent and childlike.

Shanta’s responses strike one as coming from the mind of someone much older, someone fully grown. Bhagavan was able to see beyond the packaging of the souls that came before him, and instead of seeing a little 12-year-old girl, he saw a soul that was ripe for the path. For her part, she recognized the Master’s greatness at once:

There was about him an irresistible and indefinable spiritual power which simply overwhelmed me. I was conscious of people sitting all around me but was totally incurious about them. After an hour or so of silence I suddenly felt like singing. Without hesitation or embarrassment, I lifted my 12-year-old voice in a rendition of Tyagaraja’s Vinanok koni Yunnanura, keeping time softly with my fingers on my knee. The audience sat still and unresponsive. The total lack of reaction to my performance, should in reason have embarrassed me, but I was away in a state of mind which recognised nobody except that reclining figure on the sofa. After a few minutes I threw myself with another gush of abandon into Thelisi Rama Chintana. As I began the anupallavi which exhorts the mind to stay still for a moment and realise the true essence of the name Rama, I saw the Maharshi...


Although being a wholehearted ascetic, the uncontrollable latent tendencies drew me back to an infamous state. From this fallen state, I sought refuge at his feet without neglecting the valorous Sun of Consciousness, Venkata Deva who protected me. In my pursuit to attain Self-knowledge, when I got distressed by the rancorous ego, he urged me saying, ‘Fear not’, and graciously offered me refuge at his feet. How did this miracle happen? —
turn his eyes upon me with that impersonal yet arresting look of his, and my heart soared and I thought: 'I want to be here for ever and ever.'

Shanta sat in the Hall at Bhagavan's feet for three hours each morning and three hours each evening. It soon became apparent to the family that they should try and extend their stay for as long as possible:

After the first day my family had, without any discussion, silently and unanimously agreed to change our planned programme and requested and got extension of residence. I sat in my seat near the window still and thought-free, just gazing at the Maharshi. Occasionally somebody would ask a question and the Maharshi would turn and look at him, and you got the feeling that the question had been answered. Or somebody would ask for the meaning of a particular phrase in a Sanskrit or Tamil stanza, and the Maharshi would answer softly, briefly.

He was not a man of many words. His long years of practised detachment from people made him laconic in speech. His knowledge of classical Tamil religious literature was considerable; he could himself compose verses and he did. His enlightenment had not been directed by a Guru but had come from within. It was all...
That was a strange experience for me, that in the presence of Maharshi, speech seemed redundant. I was totally and blissfully satisfied just being in his presence.

The youngster clung tightly to her daily schedule during the allotted week-long stay. Sooner than hoped, the appointed time for leaving arrived:

I practically did nothing else but sit in that Hall. We attended the Vedic recitals at dawn of the students of the Ashram Patasala. My brother and I watched every morning the Maharshi's gangly walk up and down the hill and I remember, on one memorable occasion, the gentle sage himself smilingly stood still for a couple of minutes as he saw my brother adjusting his camera. I had never before spent so many days talking so little, just sitting around so much, or so lost in a single-minded pursuit of the Maharshi. The evening we finally left, my brother and I kept coming back to look at the Maharshi ‘just one more time’ as he sat in the enclosed veranda beside the hall having a light oil massage. I finally said: ‘We will go only after he turns his head there lighting him up from inside and his most effective form of communication was intra-personal through the sense of sight and the medium of silence. He was a very human being, who laughed and joked occasionally, but he could suddenly plunge deep into himself while sitting in a hall full of people and rest in that stillness of spirit, which as he himself said, was being in God.

When a devotee appeared with some verses to show Bhagavan, the Guru made a brief comment and narrated a story from Yoga Vasistham:

I listened – and felt that I could understand the words that were being spoken though I really could not have grasped their meaning. I wondered in retrospect years later when I myself read that book, at the delightful ease and simplicity with which the Maharshi had narrated that story, going straight to the spirit of it like an aimed arrow, and then lapping into what I can only describe as a speaking silence. In those eloquent silences that punctuated his brief remarks, one seemed to feel unspoken thought flowing around the room touching and drawing everybody into its illuminating course.

Once in Bhagavan’s time when on the second day after the Deepam flame had been lit as per tradition, Arunachaleswarar and Apithakuchambal were going in procession round the Hill. When they reached the Ashram, devotees offered garlands, coconut and camphor, and then took the flame to Bhagavan in the Old Hall. When they waved the flame before Bhagavan, he exclaimed, “Why all this? Is not the Son included in the Father?” (At the Feet of Bhagavan, p. 29).

This year Arunachaleswarar and Apithakuchambal reached Sri Ramanasramam around 10 am on the morning of 8th December and were enthusiastically greeted by devotees and staff. —
and looks at us once more.’ After a minute or two the Maharshi turned full face towards us and looked at us and without a word we turned and walked away.

Years later, Shanta reminisced about what all this meant:

I shall not claim that my whole life was transformed after this meeting. No. I went back to school and then to college, got married, set up house, had children, and started a journalistic career. My grihasthasramam became my main preoccupation. But my visit to Ramanasramam had done something to me. It had left a mark on my mind and heart. The picture of the Ashram and of the Maharshi was always in my mind like the background curtain of a stage. Whenever I was tired or dispirited or perplexed the wish to go to Ramanasramam would possess me like a hunger. Even when I was so busy that I did not know whether I was coming or going a sudden look at a picture of the Maharshi hanging on the wall would momentarily root me to the spot and my mind would suddenly go blank.

I did go to Ramanasramam a fortnight before death claimed the Maharshi's frail human body. Because of the vast crowds which had come to visit him, the Ashram authorities had made special arrangements for everybody to get darshan of the white-haired smiling figure who sat on an easy-chair on the veranda of the room in which he later breathed his last. For a brief moment I stood below and looked up at that benign countenance, the eyes so bright and serene, and knew it was the last time I would be looking at the living Maharshi.

I went to the Ashram again some years later. As usual, as soon as I passed through the Ashram gates, its peace closed around me and emptied my mind. I sat on a veranda where I had only to turn my head to the left to see the mountain and bring my eyes back to the samadhi to see in my mind the Maharshi sitting on his sofa. I sat there the whole of that day doing nothing, not reading, not writing, not eating, not thinking, not remembering, not wondering why it was so quiet or where everybody was, and the voice of a young lad who came running through the gate screaming: ‘Nehru has passed away’ was just an incidental sound. During all those hours I never for a moment wanted to be anywhere else or doing anything else. Whenever I feel I want to go away somewhere, away from home, family, friends, book, mistakes, fears, sorrows, my mind automatically turns to Ramanasramam. And my body follows. I make the journey to Tiruvannamalai, walk into the Ashram, enter the Hall, and I am ‘home’ and totally at peace.

Every human being has really only one Guru like one mother. Some are fortunate enough to meet their Gurus, some pass them by, like ships in the night. I stumbled upon mine when I was twelve. I now stand alone in myself. In a sense I am twelve-going-on thirteen all over again, standing on another threshold, remembering, waiting. —

[Shanta settled in Calcutta where she and her husband wrote for The Statesman. Shanta was honoured to be chief columnist on the respected newspaper’s ‘Edit Page’. Meanwhile, she authored numerous books, among them, one on Gandhi (Pilgrim Centenary: A Remembrance, 1973), another of traditional stories for children (Tales for All Times, National Book Trust, 1971) and a translation of Kedari’s Mother, Kalki (from the Tamil, 1966). Since no photograph could be traced, a snap from Chennai, 1954, is included below picturing Shanta as Queen Gertrude in a performance of ‘Hamlet’ (top row, third from left) with members of the Press Club at the Museum Theatre.]

**Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lucy Ma Day**

On the last day of the year, devotees gathered at Lucy Ma’s samadhi to sing Aksharamanamalai. The recitation was followed by arati and distribution of prasad. When Lucy Ma’s daughter, Heike Hildebrandt was asked to sing afterward, she immediately sang a lullaby attributed to Mozart. —

Yogi Ramiah: Hailed from Nellore District, when Yogi Ramiah took up sadhana at 18, he had an experience where there was no ‘I’. Inquiring of it with local pundits brought no satisfactory reply. But in 1925, he asked Ganapathi Muni about it in Bhagavan’s presence. “The subject is of course different from the object”, replied the Muni. Ramiah was disappointed and looked to Bhagavan who added, “subject and object are distinct in the phenomenal world but in samadhi they merge and become one.”

Dr. Walter Y. Evans-Wentz: The American anthropologist who published The Tibetan Book of the Dead in 1927 studied religion and philosophy at Stanford, did his graduate work at Oxford and was influenced by T. E. Lawrence, William James and W. B. Yeats. He collected Pali texts in Sri Lanka and travelled across India, “seeking wise men of the east”. He met Bhagavan in 1935.

Munagala Venkataramiah: Born 1882, studied industrial chemistry and after being awarded the Arni Jagirdar Gold Medal, commenced a career as Lecturer in Chemistry. When his daughter passed away in 1918 at a young age, he discovered Bhagavan at Skandasramam and commenced an intensive spiritual search which included the study of Vedanta. In 1932, he came to Bhagavan for good and from 1935-1939, recorded conversations in the hall which formed the collection, Talks and translated various books, e.g. Tripura Rahasya into English. —
The eighth day of the Karthigai Deepam festival in procession with elephant around the Four Streets in the 1930s. Lower left, Yogi Ramiah, Muruganar and Kunjuswami atop the Hill with the Deepam flame smouldering behind them. Lower right, pilgrims awaiting the mounting of the deities on their respective vehicles for the procession. These photos belong to the Paul Brunton Collection, taken during the 1930s and preserved in the Ashram Archives. —

Sri Bhagavan’s Ayurvedic Recipes: Eladi Kuligai

Ingredients:
- Cardamom (9 gms);
- Nutmeg mace (9 gms);
- Cinnamon stick (9 gms);
- Rice pippali (9 gms);
- Sugar candy (18 gms);
- Licorice (18 gms);
- Dates (18 gms);
- Raisins (36 gms)

Preparation: Grind and mix well then add honey and store for 12 hours.

Benefits: One heaping tablespoon can be taken twice daily for tuberculosis and asthma. —

Eladi Kuligai

Eladi kulikaiyadu miyambak kelai
velamoudu pattiriyai patai yuntan
kalagum palamaraiyai maricit tipili
karankan matimadurani karccu rakkay
nalana diractai palam-ongre yagu
nattinag nacama araitu nelli
polaga urutti irupodu ukkollap
pokkum kayakasa rogam ellam.

Eladi kulikaiyadu iyambak kelai
velamoudu pattiriyai pataiyum tan
kalagum palamaraiyam aricit tipili
karankan atimaduram karccu rakkay
nalana diractai palam-ongre yagu
nattinag nacama araitu nelli
polaga urutti irupodu ukkollap
pokkum kayakasa rogam ellam.
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Pandaveswarar Temple Mahakumbhabhishekam

The Pandavas are the five brothers in *The Mahabharata*, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Though sons of Pandu (‘pandava’ means descendant of Pandu), the King of the Kurus, they were fathered by five different Gods. When tricked into surrendering their kingdom, the five brothers went into exile and wandered with their wife Draupadi. During twelve years of exile in the forest, they prepared for the Kurukshetra War with Krishna’s help. In their wanderings, they made their way all over the land of Bharat and are said to have come to Tiruvannamalai where they took up residence on the Holy Hill just up from the current day Ramanasramam.

In recent years, the temple that bears their name was in need of restoration. Owing to its proximity with the Ashram and given the history of the temple’s tirtham which Bhagavan sometimes swam in, the Ashram fully funded and supervised the extensive renovation of the ancient site. *Mahakumbhabhishekam* was performed on 12th December.

Announcement: Sri Ramanasramam’s Centenary Year (September 2022 - December 2023)

Sri Ramanasramam’s Centenary celebrations called, *Ramanasramam: The Next One Hundred Years*, which began 1st Sept 2022 and will continue over a 16-month period until Jayanti, 28th Dec 2023. It is recorded in one place that Bhagavan came down the Hill to stay permanently ‘about one week’ before Jayanti which fell that year on 3rd January 1923. If so, this means the Ashram would have been established with Bhagavan’s arrival around the 28th of Dec 1922. Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan invites devotees to send their suggestions for this Centenary Year to him directly at <posrm@gururamana.org>.
Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Deepam Nights

From the night of 6th December, Arunachala regaled us with his glorious brightness each night from 6 pm. Devotees gathered in front of Bhagavan’s Hall at 5.40 pm to intone Aksharamanamala and continued the recitation right up until the lighting of the flame. This nightly rite was performed right up until Saturday night the 16th December.

Announcement: Ashram Calendar of Events for 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival/Function</th>
<th>English Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavan’s 143rd Jayanti</td>
<td>07-01-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pongal</td>
<td>15-01-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinnaswami's Aradhana</td>
<td>05-02-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha Sivaratri</td>
<td>16-02-2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SRI RAMANASRAMAM SPECIAL DAYS 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival/Function</th>
<th>English Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sundaram Iyer Day</td>
<td>12-03-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Vidya Havan</td>
<td>17-03-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetugu New Year</td>
<td>22-03-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Rama Navami</td>
<td>30-03-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil New Year</td>
<td>14-04-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavan’s 73rd Aradhana</td>
<td>18-04-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maha Puja</td>
<td>12-06-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow Lakshmi Day</td>
<td>30-06-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Poornima</td>
<td>03-07-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavan’s Advent Day</td>
<td>01-09-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navaratri Festival commences</td>
<td>15-10-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati Puja</td>
<td>23-10-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijayadaasmi</td>
<td>24-10-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepavali</td>
<td>12-11-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karthigai Festival commences</td>
<td>17-11-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepam</td>
<td>26-11-2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagavan’s 144th Jayanti</td>
<td>28-12-2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Announcement: Daily Live Streaming

Ramanasramam is live streaming the Tamil Parayana and Vedaparayana each day, Mon-Sat, 5-6.45 pm IST. To access Ashram videos, go to: <https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos>
To subscribe, go to: <https://youtube.com/@siramanasramam?sub_confirmation=1>